



Department of Public Works Interoffice Memorandum

July 31, 2008

To: Mayor & Members of Council

Re: Letter to the Editor

A letter appeared in the July 30 edition of the "Voices" section of the News-Leader from Mr. Tom Martz taking issue with the 1/8-cent sales tax renewal election. The day the letter appeared was the last day the News-Leader would publish letters to the editor. So we are unable to submit a response for publication unless we opted to start a blog or a forum for an online response, which we don't believe reaches the same audience as the print publication where the letter initially appeared.

Nonetheless, we want you to know the responses to a number of the comments made in the letter to make sure you have accurate information in the final days leading to the election. We also are sending a copy of this memo to Mr. Martz. His comments from the letter appear in italics, followed by the response from Public Works.

"This sales tax has spawned such needy projects as the streetscapes ... which do nothing to enhance or regulate traffic, two parking structures located downtown and a traffic infrastructure which cannot keep up with the flow of traffic."

PW: Streetscapes are defined as an enhancement to the street environment, which provides significant public benefits for both motorized and non-motorized modes of transportation. Streetscape projects also calm the speed of traffic, which is especially appropriate in Center City where pedestrian and bike traffic is expected to be greater. The City's ability to successfully compete for state/federal enhancement funds, which are restricted to eligible transportation investments such as the streetscape projects, would not have been possible without local matching funds. To date our community has received in excess of \$3.4 million in federal/state transportation funding for streetscape projects.

Parking is an essential component of an urban transportation system and critical to the economic well-being of any downtown. It also helps to minimize adverse circulation on the street system to find a parking space. Parking structures make the most sense to conserve the available land in a downtown or center city while serving as a central point for the parking needed to support surrounding development.

The 2000 official 1/8-cent ballot language included: "shared funding for transportation and parking improvements where state, federal and/or developer funds are available to meet economic development priorities" and the 2004 official 1/8-cent ballot language included "shared funding with County, State, Federal, and Developers to advance high-priority transportation investments (street and parking)."

It should be noted that community involvement and input through the Vision 20/20 process identified both streetscape enhancements and parking as Center City priorities. Based on the community input received to date, many of our citizens not only recognize the value of accelerating sustainable transportation infrastructure, they are rightly expecting that all modes of transportation be addressed.

"Springfield has also seen fit to waste tax dollars by placing signs throughout the city trying to convince us that without these tax dollars proposed improvements to intersections will not occur. The price of these signs when tallied up with cost of materials, man hours to create and place, then to remove only to be replaced by a "working as promised" sign will be in excess of some people's annual salary here in town."

PW: Informational signs are provided to identify major projects so that the public knows in advance how their tax dollars will be invested. Seventeen information signs were installed with the assistance of MoDOT and the Greene County Highway Department. While many of these informational signs were recycled from previous elections or projects the estimated cost for new materials, labor, and installation is approximately \$200 per sign or \$3,400. Between uses, the signs are stored, and then typically reused later for ground-breakings and to keep the public informed when the committed projects are "Completed as Promised." We have received positive community feedback consistently over the years ranging from individual comments to the citizen survey that these informational signs are an effective way to communicate progress to the public.

Mr. Martz writes: "I have a HUGE problem with the wording of this tax as it is quite open-ended and allows any project to be funded with this money."

PW: We must respectfully disagree with this statement, as 1/8-cent funding can **ONLY** be used for transportation purposes. In addition, the City has made every effort to identify the specific projects and programs fully in the ballot language. There is a limited amount of funds available for cost-share projects where there are County, State, Federal and/or Developer funds available to accelerate identified or emerging transportation needs. This provision has allowed our community to be more responsive to our growing transportation needs as we compete for limited County, State, Federal and/or Developer funding.

Mr. Martz writes: "Much of the traffic problems that exist in this town is because of poor planning on the development part of this city, such is the case with allowing a Wal-Mart Supercenter and a Lowe's to be located right up next to a busily traveled interstate and state highway linking us to the northwest portion of the state including Kansas City."

PW: The diamond interchange at I-44 & Kansas Expressway (MO-13) was constructed in 1960, nearly 50 years ago. This type of interchange will accommodate traffic up to a point, but it is basically an interchange that works well in a rural/low-volume setting. It is time to modernize the interchange for greater capacity and safety. Economic development around the interchange was inevitable and each of the major developments made contributions to the state highway system. There is an old saying, "that many hands make light work." It is our belief that the 1/8-cent funding along with our working together partnership with MoDOT and Greene County has been key to our ability to complete essential transportation projects that are also vital to our continued economic well-being.

Mr. Martz writes: "It is OK for people to vote NO on Aug. 5 as this will FORCE some of the open-ended verbiage to be removed from this tax bill and increase the result which is needed infrastructure."

PW: While we respect your right to express your opinion on this important community issue, we must respectfully disagree that the ballot language is "open-ended" or that needed infrastructure improvements are not being properly addressed. As you may be aware, in an effort to provide the greatest public value, projects are jointly prioritized by the MoDOT, Greene County, and the City prior to being forwarded to City Council for public hearing before being submitted to our voters. Many of these projects have also been identified by the Ozarks Transportation Organization (OTO), which includes representatives from the entire metro area, as regional transportation priorities. These regional priorities would be significantly delayed without the continued community support of this funding initiative. As you are aware, the funding of essential infrastructure projects is at risk across our nation. This innovative partnership has provided our citizens with an opportunity to accelerate many high-priority transportation investments, which has significantly benefitted the public at large, area businesses, and motorists.

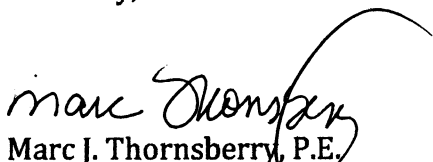
Mr. Martz writes: "Do not fall prey to the adage that it passed by a majority vote therefore the voters have chosen to fund any and all projects which might occur with this spending."

PW: Stating the results of past elections is a statement of fact. While it has been challenging, we are pleased to report that all projects have been successfully "Completed as Promised" consistent with our commitment to our citizens.

Mr. Martz writes: "... most people don't read the actual verbiage of the item being voted on, they just cast a vote in the manner of which they believe it to be the most beneficial."

PW: We have both a duty and a responsibility to inform the public in as many ways as possible about this important community initiative including through the ballot language. We believe that most voters are informed and hope that we have earned their continued trust and support. Community support and funding is essential if we are going to be able to accelerate needed transportation investments within our community.

Sincerely,


Marc J. Thornsberry, P.E.
Director of Public Works

Cc: Mr. Tom Martz
City Manager
City Clerk
PIO